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ABSTRACT

A study investigated students values to determine the regard in which today's students hold money and material possessions. Questionnaires, eliciting responses to 10 topics organized by a weighted scale, were administered to 150 students in two sections of a class in principles of public relations. Results revealed that money had minimal importance for students. Of the 10 values considered, money was ranked seventh--just ahead of sex. Health, relationships, and a career were most important to the students who participated in the study. Children, ranked dead last, were the least important. Findings challenge common beliefs about the importance of money to students and suggest that although students appear to be opportunistic and money-oriented in their actions, they are not in their beliefs. However, experience indicates that money is much more important to students than is indicated in this study, and if students' actions are different from their beliefs, then this dual standard may imply the triumph of the marketing culture in which the sale, the achievement, the winning, is everything. Finally, it is not inconsistent for the students to consider money to be unimportant while acting as if it were everything. They are operating within a fractured value structure, in which the operational and idealized values are compartmentalized. (Four figures of data are included; 16 references and 1 appendix containing the questionnaire are attached.) (KEH)

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Student Values And The Disparity Between Value And Action

or

Choices from Without

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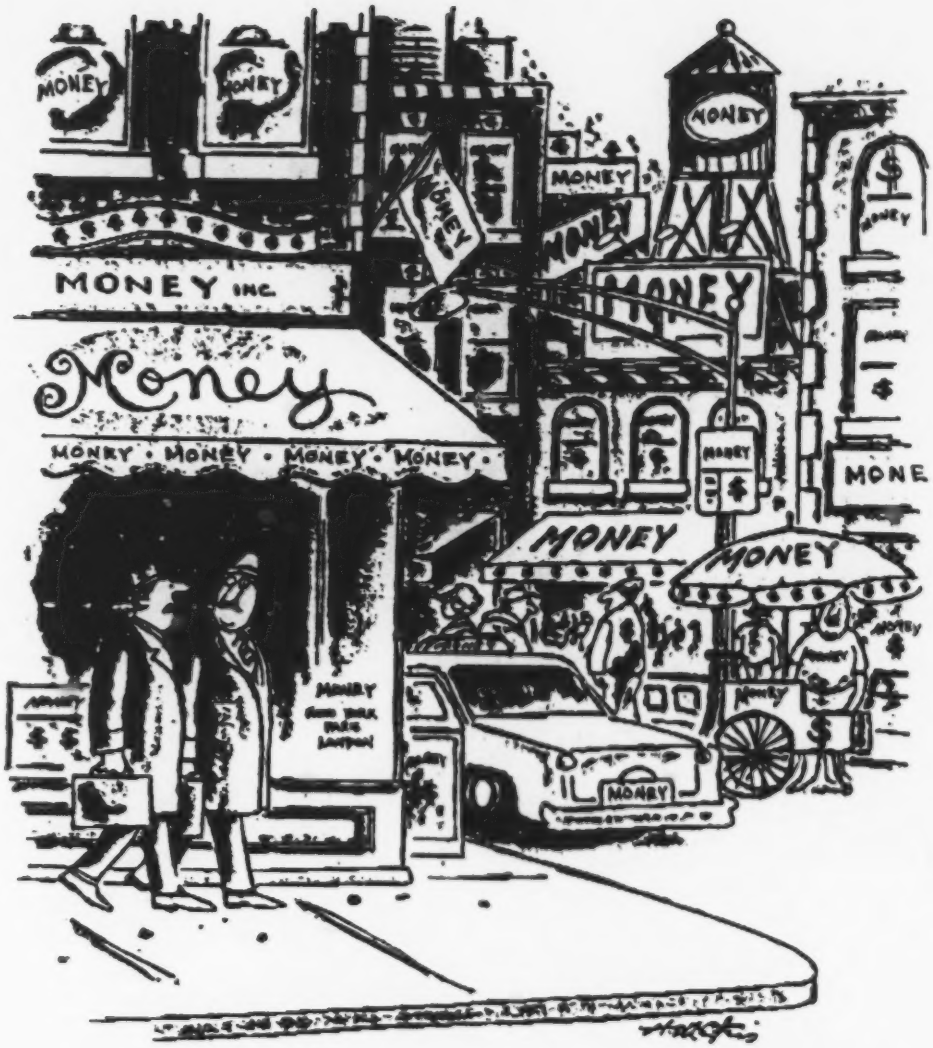
ABSTRACT

Student response to an ethical problem indicated an inordinate interest in money and led to a survey of student values.

The survey disclosed that students considered money to be minimally important. Out of ten items, money was ranked seventh (just ahead of sex).

The results challenge common beliefs about the importance of money to students and raise questions about the relation between student values and student actions.



"Remember a few years ago when everything was sex, sex, sex?"

Drawing by H. Martin © 1990 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I posed a problem for the public relations class.

You are the public relations manager of a company, I said, and you are preparing to write a news release stating that the company's earnings are favorable. You realize that you can make a great deal of money by buying stock before the earnings report becomes public information and the stock price goes up.

"Is it okay to buy the stock?", I asked, thinking that the answer was obvious.

"Sure," one of them said.

"Of course," another student said.

I was shocked. They could tell from my reaction that something was wrong and silence fell on the room.

"Is that legal," I asked, "Is it ethical?", "What about the rights of the shareholders?"

There was no guarantee that the stock price would go up, they argued. If they had the information, they should use it.

The answer I was looking for "you are an insider with special knowledge and cannot buy the stock" seemed obvious to me. But the answer wasn't obvious to them, even though they had been taught that the use of insider information was illegal.

"Weren't they thinking," I thought. "Have I failed?" "Am I teaching a class of potential criminals?" 'Could I be innocent?" "What is this strange distance between them and me?" "Do they have an ethic and, if so, what is it and how does it differ from mine?"

II. METHOD

A. Situation

I would have to determine how much they valued money before I could expect them to respond correctly to ethical questions, I reasoned. Their response to a subjective question is the correct response as far as they are concerned, isn't it, I thought. Who am I to disagree? Could it be that the answer they give is just not the answer I expect? Or is it really an incorrect answer? Who is to say what the correct answer is? Is there a correct answer other than as dictated, legally? And even if an answer is dictated legally, is this the correct answer if the practice is different than what is specified by law? If their answer is not the right answer, how do I convince them, and most importantly, how do I teach them to decide correctly and act accordingly?

B. Objective

Determine how much students value money compared to nine other items and investigate the reason for the regard in which the students hold money. Develop a standard and a code of behavior that would allow them to function and keep them out of trouble in the current cultural environment.

C. Procedure

The students were given a questionnaire which determined degree of interest in 10 subjects; money, career, success, sex, children, relationship, marriage, health, environment, and location (geographic area where they live). (See attachment 1 - Questionnaire.)

The questionnaires were administered to 150 students in two sections of a class in Principles of Pubic Relations. Practically all of the students were seniors and juniors. The average age was 24.

Students were given an opportunity to indicate how they valued each subject by checking one of five categories ranging from most important to unimportant.

The percent responses were weighted using a descending scale ranging in value from 5 for most interested to 1 for uninterested. The weighted percentages were added and divided by 5 (the number of categories) resulting in the average weighted percent response for each subject. The subjects were then arranged according to numerical order. (See Figure 1. Percent Response in Each Category.)

The difference between the total number of responses of the females (88) and the responses of the males (55) which is 142, and the total number of respondents (150) occurs because some students neglected to indicate their sex on the questionnaire.

III. RESULTS

A. General

The students are conservative, with positive attitudes about constructive elements in their lives. Students who responded to this survey are health-conscious, career-oriented and disposed to a relationship although not necessarily in a traditional marriage. The students can be characterized as healthy, pragmatic and independent with an extremely negative attitude about children.

B. Specific

Health (90) is clearly the most important concern leading all other interests by a decisive margin. Relationship (85) ranked second. (See Figure 2. Order of Priority.)

Priority	Subject	Percent
1.	Health	90
2.	Relationship	85
3.	Career	81
4.	Success	80
5.	Environment	79
6.	Marriage	78
7.	Money	76
8.	Sex	73
9.	Location	70
10.	Children	69

Figure 1. Priority of Values.

Career (81) was ranked third ahead of Success (80) by a fraction of a point indicating similar interest in what the students do and how much achievement they realize in a particular field.

Environment (79) ranked fifth, well ahead of Location (70), which ranked ninth, indicating that the quality of the environment is much more important to the students than where they live.

Marriage (78) was ranked sixth, well below Relationship but ahead of Sex (73) ranked eighth.

Money (76) was ranked seventh. Environment (and everything except location and children) was considered more important than money and sex.

Significant difference exist between male and female attitudes on the subjects of Money and Sex. Twenty-four percent of the males rated money their most significant priority compared to 6% of the females. On the subject of sex twenty percent of the males rated it the most important priority compared to only 3% of the females. (See Figure 1.2. Percent Response in Each Category (Female) and Figure 1.3. Percent Response in Each Category (Male).

Children (69) were clearly the big loser - ranked last in order of priority. The disparity between relationship (85) and marriage (78) on the one hand, and children on the other, indicates that children have little to do

ITEM		Percent of responses in this category A	B	C	D	E	Number answering this question
Q 1	Money	12.08	61.07	23.49	3.36	0.00	149
Q 2	Career	22.67	62.00	15.33	0.00	0.00	150
Q 3	Success	26.00	53.33	19.33	1.33	0.00	150
Q 4	Sex	10.74	51.68	30.87	6.71	0.00	149
Q 5	Children	20.27	33.78	25.68	10.81	9.46	148
Q 6	Relationship	40.27	46.31	10.07	2.68	0.67	149
Q 7	Marriage	34.90	37.58	14.77	8.72	4.03	149
Q 8	Health	56.00	38.67	5.33	0.00	0.00	150
Q 9	Environment	22.67	54.67	20.00	2.00	0.67	150
Q10	Location	10.27	41.78	39.73	6.16	2.05	146
Q11	*Sex	61.43	38.57	0.00	0.00	0.00	140

*A = Female B = Male

Figure 2.1 Percent Response in Each Category (Male and Female)

ITEM		Percent of responses in this category A	B	C	D	E	Number answering this question
Q 1	Money	5.75	66.67	25.29	2.30	0.00	87
Q 2	Career	18.39	68.97	12.64	0.00	0.00	87
Q 3	Success	25.00	54.55	19.32	1.14	0.00	88
Q 4	Sex	3.49	55.81	33.72	6.98	0.00	86
Q 5	Children	22.09	33.72	25.58	10.47	8.14	86
Q 6	Relationship	44.19	44.19	9.30	2.33	0.00	86
Q 7	Marriage	37.93	37.93	13.79	8.05	2.30	87
Q 8	Health	60.92	33.33	5.75	0.00	0.00	87
Q 9	Environment	25.29	56.32	17.24	0.00	1.15	87
Q10	Location	7.06	40.00	44.71	8.24	0.00	85
Q11	*Sex	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	87

*A = Female B = Male

Figure 2.2 Percent Response in Each Category (Female)

ITEM		Percent of responses in this category A	B	C	D	E	Number answering this question
Q 1	Money	24.07	51.85	18.52	5.56	0.00	54
Q 2	Career	29.09	52.73	18.18	0.00	0.00	55
Q 3	Success	29.63	50.00	20.37	0.00	0.00	54
Q 4	Sex	20.00	47.27	29.09	3.64	0.00	55
Q 5	Children	16.67	33.33	25.93	12.96	11.11	54
Q 6	Relationship	34.55	49.09	10.91	3.64	1.82	55
Q 7	Marriage	25.93	38.89	16.67	11.11	7.41	54
Q 8	Health	51.85	42.59	5.56	0.00	0.00	54
Q 9	Environment	22.22	50.00	22.22	5.56	0.00	54
Q10	Location	15.09	41.51	33.96	3.77	5.66	53
Q11	*Sex	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	54

*A = Female B = Male

Figure 2.3 Percent Response in Each Category (Male)

Figure 2 Percent Response in Each Category

with relationship or marriage at this point in the students' lives. In fact, close to ten percent of the respondents thought that children were "unimportant" the largest percent response in the "unimportant" category. "I like children but I'm not going to have any" said one female student.

IV. INCONSISTENCY

According to the study, the students do not have an inordinate concern for money. But if the students do not value money highly, why do they appear to be so materialistic and opportunistic?[1]

An article in Time magazine called the excess of the 1980's the "my decade, a time when by one's possessions thou shalt be known and judged." The value the students espoused at that time was money.[2] The value the students espouse in response to ethical questions is money. So the small regard for money is in direct contrast to the attitudes indicated during classroom experience and in recent studies. What accounts for the inconsistency?

The answer to this question requires a consideration of ethics.

V. ETHICS

Ethics is the study of the morality of human acts as determined by reason. The key word is morality. Morality is the property of an action by which it measures up to a standard of behavior. So ethics,then, is concerned with what a person ought to be and ought to do by reason of what the person is and the relation to other people. Simply by virtue of our existence together, we come to an understanding of what is considered to be acceptable. That's ethics. Let's call it a natural law.

There are three types of ethics: absolute, contextual and relative.

[1]Amitai Etzioni, "Money, Power and Fame," Newsweek September 18, 1989 p. 10.

[2]Walter Shapiro, "What's Wrong?" Time, May 25, 1987 p. 14-17.

A. Absolute

The practicing Catholic and Orthodox Jew have a clear idea of right and wrong. The decision about actions relates to the individual, another person, God, and an ultimate reward. To this type of person, morality is a key element in life, usually treasured and a dominent influence in decision-making. There is a clear concept of right and wrong and it is often expressed spontaneously.

An example of the absolute ethic can be found in the American who refused to kill the citizens of My Lai, Vietnam when ordered to do so. Harry Stanley, was ordered by Lt. Calley to execute a number of civilians who had been rounded up. Stanley refused.[3]

Calley turned his rifle toward Stanley who responded by drawing and cocking his .45-caliber pistol. A standoff occurred.

"It just seemed like not the thing to do," Stanley said.

There was no question about the rightness or wrongness of his action. Stanley stood up for his principles, despite grave potential consequences. In other words, he did what was right in accordance with his beliefs, in terms of the common good and in conformance with a natural law.

B. Contextual

The opposite of an absolute ethic is one called contextual. The contextual ethic postulates functioning without a common morality. The individual concept of right and wrong is determined by the moment. The professional crook operates totally in a contextual ethical environment and compromises nothing. It is permissable to steal. The crook has no common idea of right and wrong and thinks that what is done is correct. A murderer

[3]Biloxi Sun Herald, "War Hero Relives Day He Refused to Murder," The Orlando Sentinel, November 19, 1989, p. A-6.

who operates within a contextual ethic might think that murder is proper and ethical.

C. Relative

Our ideas of right and wrong are developed ordinarily from Judaic and Christian tradition, so the way that we feel in the United States is determined to a large degree by traditional Judaic-Christian principles tempered continuously by the developing culture. Thus, relative ethics is practiced by a person who operates within Judaic Christian principles but tempered by the times.

D. Lying

The ordinary definition of lying is speech contrary to belief. In reality other factors come into play. Suppose the U.S. Press Secretary was asked if the U.S. was invading Iran to rescue hostages while the U.S. was in the process of actually flying in an invasion force. An admission would expose the operation and be responsible possibly for a number of deaths and maybe even the failure of the operation.

In this case, the interragator is not entitled to know the truth so speech contrary to the mind, in this case denial, is not really lying because the interragator should not have a reasonable expectation of truth.

So, truth is speech in accordance with belief to those who have a reasonable expectation of it.

VI. THE IMPROPRIETIES

Students practice the relative ethic--beliefs and actions are a factor of the Judaic - Christian culture as influenced by their experience and the culture in which they function. Here are some of the experiences as reported in the media to which the students are exposed.

A. Main Event

The savings and loan bailout could cost $325 billion and could go as high as $500 billion if the economy falters according to Comptroller General Charles A. Bowsher.[4] This is the biggest financial scandal in history involving over 3000 savings and loan institutions and costing each taxpayer thousands of dollars. Former Savings and Loan officers are being found guilty of fraud. Federal regulators accused six executives of one institution, Vernon Savings, of systematic looting and wasting" of assets.[5]

B. Star Performer

Marilyn Harrell, a former escrow agent with the Department of Housing and Urban Development admitted stealing $5.7 million-a record according to federal officials, from the government.[6]

Congressional hearings have uncovered a HUD scandal in which grants were made to friends and political associates "without regard to whether the projects helped the poor".

Testimony during the scandal has connected President George Bush to it.[7]

C. Feature Attraction

The antics of Michael Milken "financial wizard, billionaire philantropist, and pioneer of the junk bond industry"[8] are becoming a legend. He was charged with 98 counts in a Federal indictment. Incidentally

[4]Associated Press, Thrift Rescue Could Cost As Much As $500 Billion," The Orlando Sentinel, April 7, 1990, B1.

[5]New York Times, "Thrift Officer Gets 30 Years," The Orlando Sentinel, April 6, 1990, C-5.

[6]Associated Press, "Robin HUD Gets the Maximum - She Asked For It," Orlando Sentinel, June 23, 1990 p. A3.

[7]Stven Waldman with Bill Turque, "HUD: From Bad to Worse", Newsweek, May 14, 1990 p. 22.

[8]Mark Hosenball, "The Friends of Michael Milken," The New Republic, August 23, 1989, 23.

he was paid $550 million in 1989 by the now defunct Wall Street brokerage Drexel Burnham Lambert.

Ivan Boesky amassed a fortune before being charged with insider trading by the Securities and Exchange Commission. Boesky, a top Wall Street speculator, paid $100 million as part of the settlement of the charges and agreed to inform on his friends and associates -- something he did during his prison sentence of three years. He spent less than two years in custody.[9]

D. Ring One

The U.S. probe of defense procurement practices named Ill-Wind, has produced many guilty pleas for a variety of crimes including conspiracy, bribery, illegal requisition of documents and making false statements from many premier defense suppliers which have paid penalties in the millions.[10]

E. Ring Two

One of the most astounding transgressions involved the former president of Beechnut, Niels L. Hoyvald, who pleaded guilty to the charge of knowingly selling sugar water to customers who thought they were buying apple juice for their babies. The babies didn't know the difference and couldn't complain if they did.

F. Continuous Performance

More than 100 officials of the Reagan administration have been charged with allegations of improper conduct. There have been cases recently of improper actions in sports, education, law and even the religious community.

[9]Renters, "Boesky's Prison Term Ends," The Orlando Sentinel, April 2, 1990, B1.

[10]Tim Smart, "Look What Ill Wind Is Blowing In," Business Week, April 16, 1990, p. 27.

G. Side Shows

Washington Mayor Marion S. Barry, Jr., who campaigned against the use of drugs, is caught on videotape smoking crack.

Members of the U.S. Coast Guard, responsible for drug interdiction, are arrested and accused of dealing in drugs.

Executives of Drexel, Burnham Lambert arranged to award themselves hefty payments just prior to the firm's bankruptcy leaving significantly reduced assets for the creditors.

Despite the huge national budget deficit, members of the U.S. Congress find a way to award themselves a substantial raise without an open vote on the issue. The open vote would have put them on record and made them responsible directly to their constituencies.

VII. CONCLUSION

Health, relationships and a career are most important to the students who participated in this study. Children, ranked dead last, are the least important.

Money has minimal importantance for the students. Of the ten values considered, money was ranked seventh - just ahead of sex.

There is a disparity on the subject of money between the results of this study and the experience of others who report that money is much more important to students than indicated in this study.

The students who participated in this study are for the most part self-supporting with a need to obtain money for necessities such as food, shelter and transportation. Money must be important to them. Perhaps it is more important than they think.

The student value for money as indicated by their response to ethical questions and apparently their response in the real world is different than their beliefs as indicated in the survey. If this is so, then the question

must be asked - why do they act differently than their convictions?

It is possible that the students have indicated an idealized version of the value they attach to money. They have expressed their abstract opinion about the importance they would like money to have but not the importance that money actually has to them.

Student values and actions are conditioned by many influences one of which is the pressures to obtain money. One of the most obvious, and different influences is the bombardment they get of one case after another in which people are taking something, usually money, which they are not entitled to. Often a direct violation of trust is involved. These people are saying one thing while doing another in order to get money or other gratification.

Now, if the students are thinking one thing, and doing another, this may have a familiar ring to it. False is the word that comes to mind. Dishonest is another.

But these students are not dishonest. At least not knowingly. It was their act of answering the ethical questions and the survey honestly that brought the inconsistency between the way they feel and the way they act on the subject of money to the surface.

It is also possible that the finding of this study--that students don't care much about money, is an accurate reflection of their attitude and their action. While I would hope that his is so, I would be dishonest if I said I believed it.

Thus one more question must be asked "Just who is doing what they're supposed to be doing these days?"

The inconsistency between attitude and action was noticed 2,000 years ago when the Apostle Paul said:

> "My point is that you should live in accord with the spirit and you will not yield to the cravings of the flesh. The flesh lusts against the

spirit and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly opposed. This is why you do not do what your will intends."[11]

So, it is possible the observation that there is a difference between student attitude and action where money is concerned, is simply another example of a human characteristic identified years ago.

If it is true that the student actions are different than their beliefs and that they are very opportunistic and money-oriented, then perhaps we are witnessing the triumph of the marketing culture in which the sale, the achievement, the winning, is everything. The ethic is ordained by the culture and it comes from outside the individual.

Thus, there is no ethic other than the exploitive; there is no greater principle other than the functional when the students are operating on the materialistic level of the dual standard.

The dual standard allows them to separate morality and responsibility from the action. When functioning in this mode nothing is genuine. The responsibility is to the sale, the grade, the job, the promotion, the money and the rightness of the act is judged only by expediency.

Finally, it is not inconsistent for the students to consider money to be unimportant while acting as if it were everything. They are operating with a fractured value structure in which the operational and idealized values are compartmentalized.

More on the possible disparity between the indicated concern students have for sex (minimal) and the reality at a future time.

[11]"The Epistle of Paul to the ##?##?Galatians," The New American Bible The New Testament, Chapter 5, V 16 and 17, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1970, p. 226.

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Attachment 1. Questionnaire.

Dear Student:

I'm interested in how you feel about things and you've been great about telling me.

Now I'm trying to generate some empirical data so we can get an accurate idea about how your individual feelings compare to those of your classmates.

Would you please indicate your preference for the undernoted subjects in the corresponding numbered space on the answer sheet.

Indicate your degree of preference according to this scale.

Most Important	Very Important	Important	Little Importance	Unimportant
A	B	C	D	E

Subjects

1 Money
2 Career
3 Success
4 Sex
5 Children
6 Relationship
7 Marriage
8 Health
9 Environment
10 Location

Then, Please indicate your sex in number 11. Fill in the "A" box if you are female, the "B" box if you are male.

This should be an interesting survey. I'll let you know the results.

Please be honest.

Thanks,

Guy McCann